



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Celebrates 30 Year Anniversary of the Child Passenger Safety Law

Bismarck, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health is celebrating the 30 year anniversary since North Dakota first passed its child passenger safety law in 1983. That year, less than 5 percent of infants and toddlers were using a child restraint while traveling in a vehicle. In 2012, observation surveys showed restraint use for infants and toddlers was at 93 percent.

“Because of this important law, North Dakota children have grown up with child restraints and seat belts,” said Dawn Mayer with the North Dakota Department of Health’s Child Passenger Safety Program. “Although we still see some unrestrained children, buckling up has become a normal part of a child’s routine and is saving lives every day.”

Since passage of the original law, North Dakota has continued to show support for child passengers through gradual improvements in the law based on research and technical knowledge. Current law requires children younger than 7 to use a child restraint; children ages 7 through 17 must be buckled in a seat belt or child restraint.

The last three decades have seen major changes in how children are transported as child restraint and vehicle manufacturers work to make products safer using federal safety standards and technology. Some of these changes have included:

- Car seats now accommodate children in all stages of life, starting with their first ride. Many have harnesses that can be used for higher-weight children; some booster seats fit children up to 120 pounds; some car seats can be used rear-facing until the child reaches 40 pounds; and most manufacturers do side-impact testing on their products – above what is required by the federal standards. Manufacturers also look to comfort and convenience for the parent and child when designing their products.
- Vehicle air bags, starting with driver systems, followed by front seat passenger air bags and eventually side-impact and curtain airbags throughout the vehicle. New technology uses

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sensors to identify weights of passengers and deploys airbags with less force or not at all. However, the recommendation remains for children younger than 13 to ride in the back seat.

- In 1990, shoulder belts became required equipment in the rear outboard seats of new passenger vehicles, allowing the use of booster seats by children who outgrew regular car seats. In 2002, lap-shoulder belts became standard equipment in the center seating positions of back seats.
- In 2000, vehicle and child restraint manufacturers began phase-in of the LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children) system that provided an alternative way of installing car seats, rather than the seat belt.

Mayer says she has seen many changes in child restraints in the 17 years she has worked with the program. “There are many products to choose from,” said Mayer. “We work with parents and caregivers so they can select a product that will work best for their child’s age and weight and that they can use correctly every time they travel with that child.”

For more information about Child Passenger Safety Month, contact Dawn Mayer, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.4536.

Note to Media: As part of the celebration, the department is inviting the public and members of the media to a celebration in the Great Hall of the State Capitol Building on Monday, Feb. 11, 2013, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Cake will be served and there will be a display showing the evolution of car seats through the years. Employees from the Department of Health’s Division of Injury Prevention and Control will be available for interviews.

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